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NCC TO TRAIN 10,000 CADETS TO DEAL WITH CYBER ATTACKS

National Cadet Corps will train a group of 10,000 'cyber warriors' who can contribute to bolstering India's digital defence mechanism

SPECIAL HUBS FOR TRAINING IN THE OFFING

NCC has also planned to train one lakh cadets as first responders in the wake of natural disasters, Director General, NCC, Lt Gen Virendra Vats said at a press conference on its Republic Day Camp 2026 in New Delhi. It has started work on raising four to five hubs across the country where select cadets can be trained on drone and counter-drone aspects

CADETS TO BE LINKED TO NATIONAL DATABASE

- These cadets will be known as Yuva Apda Mitras, and they will be trained and linked with the national database, so that the services can be used by the nation in case of need in future, Vats said
- NCC plans to increase its strength from 17 lakh to 20 lakh in a phased manner, and is looking to achieve this goal by 2028

40%

OF THE NCC'S TOTAL CURRENT STRENGTH COMPRISES GIRLS

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

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U.S. SNATCHES MADURO

Venezuela Prez, wife being taken to New York in dramatic coup; US will run country for now

A videograb of a blaze in Caracas on Saturday after US bombing; and President Trump releases the first photograph of Nicolas Maduro on board the USS Iwo Jima en route the US | X/AP

AGENCIES @ Caracas

THE United States captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and whisked him out of the country in a brazen and surreal military operation early Saturday that plucked a sitting leader from office.

President Donald Trump said US will "run" Venezuela until a political transition takes shape, and he would tap Venezuela's gigantic oil reserves to sell to other countries.

The action marked the culmination of an escalating Trump administration pressure campaign on the South American country that consisted of months of strikes on boats that officials said were smuggling drugs to the US.

Behind the scenes, US officials tracked Maduro's behavioral habits, including what he ate and where he slept, in preparing for the stunning regime change. The 'extraction' in Caracas, codenamed 'Operation Absolute Resolve', took months of rehearsal and more than 150 US aircraft, including F-18, F-22 and F-35 fighter jets, B-1 bombers and drones, top US General Dan Caine said.

In a series of fast-moving events, Caracas was rocked by seven explosions, accompanied by sound of attack helicopters, 2 am local time (11.30 am IST). The strikes, which targeted a major military base and an airbase, among other sites, continued for nearly an hour.

Trump described Maduro as being "highly guarded" in a presidential palace that was "like a fortress." Maduro had nearly made it to a safe room inside it, Trump told reporters, although "he was unable to close it." American forces were armed with "massive blowtorches," which they would have used to cut through steel walls had Maduro locked himself in the room, Trump said.

"It had a safety space, where it's solid steel all around," Trump said. "He didn't get that space closed. He got bumrushed so fast that he didn't get into that. We were prepared."

Trump said Maduro and his wife were flown by helicopter to a US warship and would go to New York to face charges. He later posted on Truth Social a photo of Maduro in a gray sweatsuit, protective headphones and blindfold.

Trump scotched any expectation that Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado herself should emerge as Venezuela's new leader. She doesn't have "support or respect" there, he said. Trump indicated he could work with Maduro's deputy, vice president Delcy Rodriguez, saying "she's essentially willing to do what we think is necessary to make Venezuela great again." P14

AVOID TRAVEL, SAYS MEA ADVISORY

The Ministry of External Affairs urged Indians to avoid all non-essential travel to Venezuela. It asked Indian nationals to contact +58-412-9584288 in case of an emergency

Govt aiming to bring ELCITA under GBA or B'luru South dist?

MOHAMMED YACOOB @ Bengaluru

DIRECTIONS from Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development Minister DK Shivakumar and senior officials of the Urban Development Department to the Electronic City Industrial Township Authority (ELCITA) to share details of property tax collection are being seen as a move to either merge ELCITA with the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) area or push the IT belt into the administrative limits of Bengaluru South District, which was earlier Ramanagara, in the coming days.

ELCITA has also been told to inform the government whether its funds are being spent on the development of panchayats around the IT hub.

The direction was reportedly issued at a review meeting chaired by the DCM on Saturday at the Bengaluru Metropolitan Regional Development Authority (BMRDA) head office on Ali Asker Road. Chief officers of six town municipalities — Anekal, Bommasandra, Hunasamaranahalli, Chikkabanavara, Chandapura and Jigani — attended the meeting and briefed the DCM about the developmental activities and revenue capabilities in their limits.

ELCITA, with an annual tax collection of Rs 29 crore, manages its own affairs -- from processing waste to maintaining roads to caring for its trees.

The meeting also discussed how building and construction plans are approved within ELCITA limits. "ELCITA has the authority to give planning and construction approvals. But now, UDD is likely to step in. We have no clue what is happening in ELCITA. How it is being run and who is running it. There is no clarity on whether the people at the top of the hierarchy are appointed by the government. To address all these issues, a review meeting was held," said a top UDD official.

ELCITA officials like Chairman V Veerappan, Chief Administrative and Security Officer Col Aniruddha N Gudi and a few other representatives also attended the meeting.

CONTINUED ON: P5

SC order on Khalid's bail tomorrow

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court will on Monday pronounce its order on the bail petitions of Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam and five others in the 2020 Delhi riots larger conspiracy case.

They were booked under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and provisions of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly being the masterminds of the riots. A two-judge bench comprising justices Aravind Kumar and N V Anjaria had reserved their verdict on December 10.

The verdict comes in the wake of New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani writing a note to Khalid, recalling his words on 'bitterness' and the importance of not letting it "consume one's self".

Parallelly, eight American lawmakers wrote to Indian Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra on December 30, urging a fair and timely trial for Khalid and others in accordance with international law and bail for the duration of the court's proceedings.

RIPPLE EFFECT

KKR DROP BANGLADESH PLAYER, FOCUS SHIFTS TO T20 WORLD CUP TIES

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

AMIDST the rising criticism over signing Bangladesh seamer **Mustafizur Rahman**, Kolkata Knight Riders released the player from their IPL 2026 squad following instructions from the cricket board. On Friday, Shah Rukh Khan and his franchise came under severe attack from certain quarters for buying the Bangaldeshi bowler. The BCCI on Saturday said that it has instructed the franchise to release the Bangladesh player citing current situation in the country.

What seems to be even more interesting is that Bangladesh would be playing four matches in India — three in Kokata, one in Mumbai — during the T20 World Cup starting next month. Bangladesh Cricket Board has already called for an emergency meeting on Saturday night. If the matches do get affected, then the entire World Cup schedule might have to be rejigged. Pakistan, which refused to play in India because of security reasons, will play in Sri Lanka. As for KKR, it confirmed "that the BCCI/IPL, as the regulator of the IPL, has instructed it to release Mustafizur from the squad ahead of upcoming IPL season. The release has been carried out following due process and consultations."

KKR had signed Rahman for ₹9.2 crore in the auction last month — the only Bangladeshi player to get picked — but had come under criticism on social media and from political parties owing to turmoil there.

Shortly after BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said that they have asked KKR to release Rahman, the franchise confirmed the development. The BCCI said that KKR would allowed a replacement. "Due to the recent developments that are going on all across, BCCI has instructed the franchise KKR to release one of their players, Mustafizur Rahman of Bangladesh," Saikia told a news agency.

Fund crunch may force 600 unaided Kannada schools to shut down

RASHMI PATIL @ Bengaluru

WHILE thousands of government schools are on the verge of closure, the picture is no different for unaided Kannada medium schools. Around 600 such schools and colleges are on the verge of shutting down because of lack of funds to pay the salaries of teachers or to develop their infrastructure.

Teachers from these schools have now written to Minister for School Education and Literacy Madhu Bangarappa, asking him to release funds to clear their salaries.

Santhosh, a teacher at Vanitha Kannada High School in Kirthi Nagar, Bommanakatte, in Shivamogga, said, "The last time that an unaided school was converted into aided was in 1995. The last time that grants were given by the government to provide salaries for teachers was also the same year."

He said, "We don't charge a single rupee from students at our school, but provide quality education. If the schools shut down, many teachers will lose their jobs and over 6,000 children will be impacted. More importantly, there will be no Kannada schools which are as important as English medium ones. P7

In five years, more tigers died outside protected reserves

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @ New Delhi

INDIA'S tiger conservation success story has a flip side. More big cats are dying outside protected reserves than inside them. Latest data from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) shows that of 166 tiger deaths in 2025 in India. 88 deaths or 53 per cent were recorded outside a protected tiger reserve. (see table).

In all, around 51% of 725 recorded fatalities in the last five years occurred outside tiger reserves, driven by the fact that about 30% of the country's tigers now roam freely outside notified protected areas and exposing them to risks like human conflict, road accidents, electrocution and poisoning.

A senior NTCA officer, who asked not to be named, pointed to severe staffing shortages. "We're stretched thin in the field. Our forensic labs are understaffed too, which delays sample analysis and slows our response. That's partly why poachers aren't caught and prosecuted quickly enough."

The backlog tells the story. While 24 tigers were confirmed killed by poachers in 2019, five cases from that year remain under investigation.

Tiger deaths outside protected forest areas

YEAR	TOTAL MORTALITY	OUTSIDE	% OF TOTAL MORTALITY OUTSIDE
2025	166	88	53.01
2024	126	65	51.58
2023	182	100	54.94
2022	122	52	42.62
2021	129	64	49.61

The pending cases have shot up: from 37 in 2020 to 58 in 2021, 51 in 2022, 64 in 2023, 67 in 2024, and 140 in 2025.

The latest State of Tiger report confirms one in five staff positions remain empty across tiger reserves. Some locations are missing 40% or more of required protection personnel. Twenty reserves reported inadequate anti-poaching staff.

The rising number of tiger deaths outside protected areas prompted the Environment Ministry to launch a pilot to manage human-tiger conflicts across 10 states, with an allocation of ₹88 crore. "This pilot scheme doesn't address the core issue of staff shortage," said the officer.

3/4 OF ALL TIGERS IN INDIA

India hosts 75% of the world's tiger populace. As per All India Tiger Estimation 2022, India's tiger population is 3,682. India has 58 tiger reserves

EXPRESS READ

14 Maoists killed in Chhattisgarh encounters

Sukma/Bijapur: At least 14 Maoists, including wanted ultras Vetti Mangdu and Madvi Hunga and six women, were killed in separate encounters in Sukma and Bijapur districts in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh on Saturday | P12

6 cops hurt in mob attack during raid on TMC leader

Kolkata: Six policemen were injured after a mob attacked them during a raid at the residence of a local Trinamool Congress leader Musa Mollah on Friday night. Mine persons have been arrested in connection with the incident | P12